

**Course number:** M-PR 1601  
**Course title:** Foundations of Instrumental Studies:  
**Credits:** 1.0  
**Prerequisites:** None

**Instructor:** Alex Polyakov  
**email:** Apolyakov@berklee.edu

**Meeting Time(s):** 4pm on Mondays  
**Location:** 306

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## COURSE DESCRIPTION

First course of a two-semester, first-year seminar sequence, Foundations of Instrumental Studies is designed to serve as a welcome and introduction to this next important step in your journey toward a life in the arts, no matter what shape and direction that might take. With the primary goal of helping you to make your everyday activities as an artist more mindful - this course will cover a variety of topics aimed to assist you in making a smooth transition into the world of academia. In addition to that, students who take and complete this course will be able to re-imagine their approach to familiar processes (such as practicing piano or performing on stage), by refreshing and re-creating their own personalized foundations of good and healthy habits - for a lifelong music making, and music sharing experience.

On top of the regular structure, this course will incorporate several interchangeable modules that will be used based on the needs of the students who are taking this course, thus - each time this course will be taught, it may be a bit different. In the rapidly changing social and educational environment, I also reserve the right to make adjustments to the syllabus in the interest of addressing concerns and needs of every student, and in the interest of maintaining an inclusive and engaging learning experience.

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## LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Integrate into the larger community of artists at Boston Conservatory
  - Model effective and efficient practice techniques and time management for musicians
  - Further develop concentration and mindful approach to everyday music-related activities
  - Nurture personal motivation and goal setting mindset
  - Obtain basic skills to help in overcoming performance anxiety
  - Develop health and wellness habits conducive to a lifelong successful career in the arts and as a performer
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## CLASSWORK AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

### Participation and attendance

Active student participation is highly encouraged, and required in order to make this course as beneficial, to you personally, as possible. Please do not hesitate to express your concerns, feelings and suggestions while taking this class, or after completing it. When observing lectures, whether online or in the classroom - take notes, and write down any question you may have - so that we can address it at the next group or individual meeting. Email is always the best form of communication with me.

Students are expected to attend any class. In case of a conflict or unexpected situation - please communicate it to the instructor of the course before the class.

### Reading

Reading assignments are kept to an absolute minimum, as the majority of activities will involve an active discussion and student's participation. Having said that - students are expected to read assigned pages before the beginning of the class, for each week that has an assigned reading.

Although this course will not go through the entire books - students are encouraged to complete reading both books, when their schedules allow (perhaps, during Winter or Summer breaks). After finishing these books - students will establish a very solid foundation to build their careers upon, as well as professional and artistic health and well being.

### **Writing assignments & Handwritten vs. Typed**

This is not a writing- or reading-based course, nonetheless there will be a number of short quizzes, summarizing what you have learned in the previous lectures. Anything that I talk about in the lecture (including reading segments, and including open-ended questions that I need your opinion on) - may end up in the quiz, or written assignment.

One important note - I would like to encourage you to make handwritten notes, instead of typing. It is urgently important for your hands, not to be overworked, by typing excessively on the computer keyboard. I recommend you take handwritten notes for any class that you are enrolled in, or whenever you can substitute typing for writing with the pen on paper. On top of being a healthier option for your hands, it is also proven to be a more effective learning tool for our brain.

I will accept handwritten writing assignments, to promote this hand-injury-prevention-behavior, just take a bit extra time to make them legible.

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### **EVALUATION AND GRADING**

**Students are expected** to observe and become familiar with the material presented in each lecture. Asking questions and raising additional topics is highly encouraged - as it can become the basis of our discussion in the subsequent lectures.

Completion of all of the Writing Assignments is required in order to obtain a passing final grade for this course. Late assignments, generally, will not be accepted for a credit - but, when you anticipate having trouble with anything - please notify me as soon as you can. Communication is the key!

#### Grading calculations:

Class participation - 1% (of the final grade for this class)

5 Quizzes - 25% (5% each)

2 Reflection Papers - 34%

Midterm project - 30%

Final Project - 10%

Class participation - is very important for this class, and students are expected to actively participate in discussions, pose questions, and share with their own experiences and thoughts, generally related to what is being discussed in this class this term. It is the belief of the instructor of this course, that students should be encouraged to participate in conversations with their peers and the instructor, out of curiosity and desire to exchange information and practical (musical) experiences, rather than out of feeling forced to pose a question because it may negatively affect the grade.

- Please keep in mind - the more you participate, the more questions you ask - the more relevant and useful this class is going to be to you personally!

Quizzes - normally would take place during the group meeting, and in order to receive a passing grade - no additional coursework is required, other than attentively observing and participating in lectures. Short tests, consisting of 5-10 questions, covering the topics and discussion of the most recent lectures.

2 Personal Reflection papers (Writing assignments) - 500-750 words each. You will be asked a few questions in each of the assignments - and you will have a choice to answer a question that is most interesting or relevant to you (you can choose to answer one or all questions - that has no effect on the grading). There is no additional reading to be completed in order to receive a passing (A) grade for this assignment. Assignments will be evaluated based on your personal input - your thoughts, and personal experience as an artist at the piano or in the field of music. Quality of writing (language/grammar) will not be graded - but students are expected to write using complete sentences, and proof-read before submitting (to reduce any obvious errors or misprints).

- I really want you to spend less time writing and more time thinking about what is being discussed, asking yourself, possibly new, questions and trying to honestly answer them to yourself. The writing portion of the course is frequent, but rather short.

**Midterm Project** - students will be asked to create and use their own (piano) practicing journal, for the period of 2 weeks. Students will be asked to (digitally) submit their works via email before the due date (Nov 14). It is strongly encouraged to do this assignment using pen and paper - which later, can be scanned, or taken picture of, and sent via email.

- There is no wrong way to do this assignment! The key idea is to find a way to keep your practicing organized, and keep track of your own progress, as you are preparing your repertoire for an important performance (shall that be an audition/concert/juries).

I will surely provide more explanations and examples of what you can do, over the upcoming weeks of the term. And those of you who have previous experience with practicing journals - are encouraged to speak up!

**Final Project** - at the end of the term, students will be asked to create a concise (word, or handwritten) document - relating to their musical experience before this term, as well as to their life as a student. Students will be asked to write:

- 10 tips (pieces of advice) of what to do (as a musician) and 10 tips what not to do (as a musician)  
OR
- 7 tips what to do as a musician, 7 tips what not to do as a musician, and 7 tips what to do for a student

After the end of the term - these tips will be added to the document from the last year (Fall 2020), and will be combined with the input of students of the very first Foundation class. After which - this archival document will be shared with everyone who is taking this class, and who has taken in the past.

#### **A few things to keep in mind:**

1. Writing Assignments will not be graded (resulting in “F” for the assignment) if I find in your paper a simple repetition of the statements I make in the lectures. Take notes of the lectures - but don’t just copy them into written assignments. What I want is to read YOUR thoughts on the material that is being discussed - hence the name of the assignment - personal reflection. No additional work is necessary to complete it and to receive a passing grade for it, other than - thinking about the questions that will be asked, and writing what is genuinely in your mind.
2. It goes without saying - Writing Assignments is not a collective work. I encourage you to discuss the topics among your colleagues - but when it comes to writing - I need YOUR individual input. If I find two similarly written works - both may receive a non-passing grade.
3. Final Project counts only for 10% of your final grade for this class - and it is done so in order to resonate with one of the main philosophies of this class. It is not the final result that you need to pay close attention to, but what you learn about yourself along the way; what you learn about **your own** learning process, how do **you** learn most effectively and efficiently. Playing an outstanding, or less than successful concert is, usually, only a confirmation of the quality of thoughts you put into the process of practicing the piano and your everyday life.

#### **RECOMMENDED READING MATERIALS**

**Title:** *The Inner Game of Music*  
**Author(s) or Editor:** Barry Green and W. Timothy Gallwey  
**Publisher:** Pan MacMilland; Main Market Ed.  
**Date and/or Edition:** January 2015  
**ISBN:** 978-1447291725

**Title:** *The Musician’s Way: A Guide to Practice, Performance, and Wellness*  
**Author(s) or Editor:** Gerald Klickstein  
**Publisher:** Oxford University Press.  
**Date and/or Edition:** September 2009  
**ISBN:** 978-0195343137

Additional free resources can be found at - [musiciansway.com](http://musiciansway.com)

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#### **COURSE OUTLINE\*** **FALL 2021**

**Week 1** - Labor day

**Week 2** (September 12-18)

- Introductions and Course overview
- Goal setting
  - Personal & Artistic goals
- Feeding your motivation

**Week 3** (September 19-25) - QUIZ #1

- Collaborating with others
- What to do before your first chamber music rehearsal
- Accompanying others

**Week 4** (September 26 - October 2)

- Practicing Foundations
  - Environment
  - Useful devices & recording

**Week 5** (October 3-9)

- Practicing hygiene (cont.)
  - Sight-reading
  - Distractions
  - Healthy habits
  - Time Management
  - Injury Prevention

**Week 6** (October 10-16) - QUIZ #2

- Mental and Mindful Practice
  - Practicing without piano

**Week 7** (October 17-23)

- Open Discussion (overflow week)

**Week 8** (October 24-30) - QUIZ #3

- Memorization
- Technique Development
  - Exercises and improving your skills using your repertoire
- Awareness in practicing
  - Practicing Journal
  - Self-accountability
  - How to work efficiently between the semesters
  - Finding and setting up personal working habits for after the graduation

**Week 9** (October 31- November 6) - REFLECTION PAPER #1 (Due 7)

- Overflow week (open discussions)
- Additional topics (questions that may have been raised in the previous weeks)
  - Performing with the orchestra
  - Score study (analysis and becoming familiar with a style)

**Week 10** (November 7-13) - QUIZ #4, and MIDTERM Assignment (due Nov 14)

- On injury prevention
  - Work & rest
  - Practical working schedule
  - Getting closer to the performance

**Week 11** (November 14-20)

- On Anxiety
  - Before the concert/audition/jury
  - At the concert

**Week 12** (November 21-27 - Thanksgiving Break)  
To Be Announced

**Week 13** (November 26 - December 4) - REFLECTION PAPER #2 (Due on Dec 5)

- On Anxiety - 3 Stress Coping Skills (more in-depth next term)
  - Quieting down
  - Progressive relaxation
  - Centering

**Week 14** (December 5-11) - QUIZ #5

- Career Development [Beyond the talent]
  - Creating opportunities
  - Gigs (Booking Concerts)
  - Recordings

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\* I Reserve the right to make slight adjustments to the general outline, which includes - topics of lecture and the dates of writing assignments.